

New York Academy of Art Gives Away Money Donated by Jeffrey Epstein

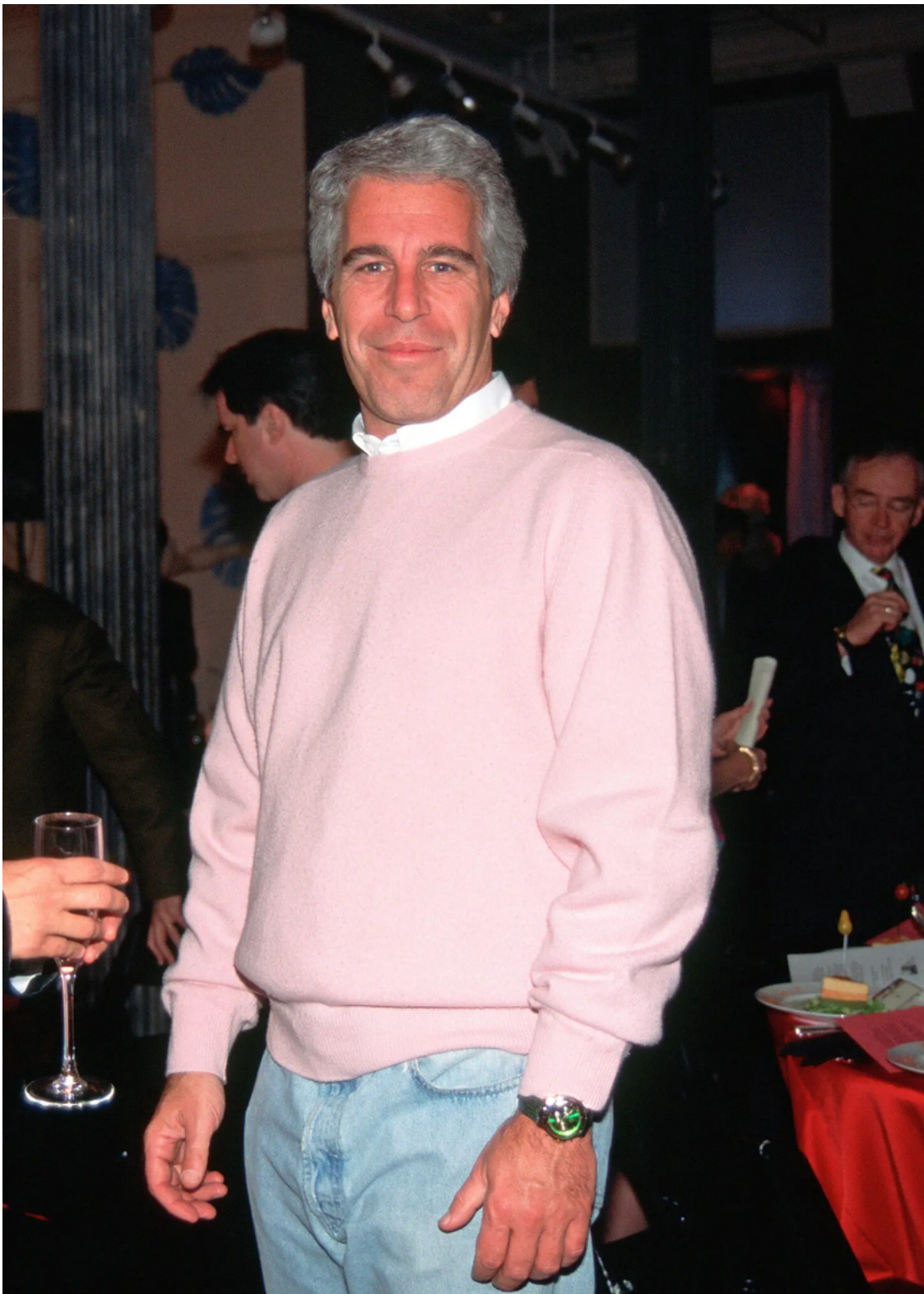
The school also said that it would review policies about philanthropy and donor engagement after new revelations about the disgraced financier were made public.



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Jeffrey Epstein attended the Tribeca Ball benefiting the New York Academy of Art in 1996. *Andrea Renault/Star Max, via lpx*



By **Dionne Searcey**

March 13, 2026

The New York Academy of Art, where a former student was among the first to complain to authorities about the behavior of Jeffrey Epstein, announced on Friday that it was giving away money that Mr. Epstein had donated after new revelations about his involvement there were made public.

Files recently released by the Department of Justice showed that some of Mr. Epstein’s ties to the academy, which was co-founded by Andy Warhol, were more extensive than previously known, with involvement years after he had been investigated in Florida in connection with the sexual abuse of underage girls. The academy said on Friday that it would review its policies on philanthropy and the way it engages with donors.

The disgraced financier, who had served on the academy’s board in the early 1990s, had been courted to sponsor a scholarship program, and he attended the academy’s fund-raising events, including the Tribeca Ball and Take Home a Nude auction.

In a statement emailed to students and alumni on Friday, the board expressed regret for the academy’s long association with Mr. Epstein. It also said the chair of the academy’s board would retire in April, a month earlier than expected.

Mr. Epstein was jailed for 13 months for state prostitution crimes and was arrested again in 2019 on federal charges accusing him of trafficking dozens of girls, some as young as 14, and engaging in sex acts with them. His 2019 death in jail was ruled a suicide.

“The academy should not have accepted contributions from him, allowed him to attend academy events or permitted him to have any connection to programs involving students or other community members after his criminal conduct had become known,” the board said in its email, which admitted to “serious failures in judgment and governance.”

The school plans to give \$65,900 to an organization that helps trafficked girls. The academy had already had given away \$30,000 that Mr. Epstein had donated.

The New York Academy of Art opened in 1982 as an anti-abstractionist school, aimed at teaching figurative drawing when traditional methods had fallen out of favor.

It attracted eccentrics (a pet boa constrictor was kept in one office) and [scandal](#) (a fiscal controller once embezzled \$175,000), and it was known for elaborate fund-raising parties where performances sometimes began after the shattering of a wine glass. Its galas draw celebrities and socialites.

In 1993, Maria Farmer moved to New York to attend the academy and has said she first met Mr. Epstein at a gallery thesis art show for her graduation. She said the dean of the academy at the time, Eileen Guggenheim, introduced her to Mr. Epstein and his longtime partner, Ghislaine Maxwell, and told her to sell them one of her paintings at a discount. (Ms. Guggenheim [has said she did not recall such an interaction.](#))



Annie Farmer, who has said she was abused by Jeffrey Epstein, holds up a photo of herself and her sister Maria Farmer, who also said she was abused by Mr. Epstein. Heather Diehl/Getty Images

Ms. Farmer, when she was in her 20s, went to work for Mr. Epstein acquiring art on his behalf, and later managing the entrance to a townhouse that he was renovating. She said that he and Ms. Maxwell assaulted her while she was staying with them at an estate in Ohio.

Soon after returning to New York in 1996, Ms. Farmer contacted the police and the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

No action was taking by authorities at the time.

She has said that she also talked about the encounter with Ms. Guggenheim, who is now the chair of the academy's board.

Ms. Farmer has said that Ms. Guggenheim did not appear to take her concerns seriously. Ms. Guggenheim told The New York Times in 2019 that the details Ms. Farmer shared about Mr. Epstein did not rise to a level that would require intervention.

Ms. Guggenheim did not immediately respond on Friday to a request for comment. A lawyer for Ms. Farmer declined comment.

Alumni of the academy in 2020 circulated a petition calling for more safety for students. The academy commissioned an internal investigation by a law firm, which interviewed Ms. Guggenheim and others. (Ms. Farmer did not cooperate with the investigation, the firm noted.)

According to a copy of the investigation, Ms. Farmer had told Ms. Guggenheim “the creepiest thing happened” with Mr. Epstein. She explained how Mr. Epstein and Ms. Maxwell had called her into their bedroom and asked her to join them in bed, but that Ms. Farmer “freaked out” and left.

“Don’t put yourself in those kinds of situations,” Ms. Guggenheim told Ms. Farmer, according to the report, which said Ms. Farmer did not mention she was touched or assaulted.

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The law firm, called Walden Macht & Haran at the time the report was filed, noted in the report that it had previously represented Ms. Guggenheim before investigating her.

The law firm found no evidence that Ms. Guggenheim knew about any sexual abuse of Ms. Farmer, according to the investigation.



Eileen Guggenheim is chair of the board at the New York Academy of Art. Krista Schlueter for The New York Times

In 2020, the academy issued an apology to Ms. Farmer and announced new safeguards for students.

Anastasiya Tarasenko, who graduated from the academy in 2017, has been combing through Justice Department filings about Mr. Epstein and was troubled by new revelations that show Ms. Guggenheim engaged with Mr. Epstein after his misdeeds in Florida were known.

“Fund-raising is a huge part of keeping that school alive,” Ms. Tarasenko said. “My concern comes from a place of love for the school. I want to protect the space and protect the students.”

Emails from Justice Department filings indicate that Ms. Guggenheim was interviewed by the F.B.I. about Ms. Farmer's encounter with Mr. Epstein in 2007.

Ms. Guggenheim told agents that Ms. Farmer returned from Ohio "very upset" and that she did not know the details, but believed Ms. Farmer "was hurt possibly by a verbal suggestion made by Epstein."

In later years, Mr. Epstein attended the academy's Tribeca Ball, toured studios and purchased artwork.

"It was incredibly wonderful of you to come back," Ms. Guggenheim wrote in a 2012 email addressed to Mr. Epstein and sent through his personal assistant. She added, "I just want you to know how much Russ and I and the whole school appreciates your involvement."

(Ms. Guggenheim's husband, Russell Colgate Wilkinson, is a former chair of the academy's board.)

In 2013, she invited Mr. Epstein to sponsor a portrait scholarship, the files show, and in March of the following year, Mr. Epstein's assistant emailed him to assure him he was on the top of the waiting list for the sold-out Tribeca Ball, writing that, "Eileen Guggenheim will do everything she can to get you a table."

Six days later, Mr. Epstein’s assistant wrote him to say that a table had been secured by Ms. Guggenheim.

“Eileen is very happy and says she looks forward to seeing you,” the assistant, Lesley Groff, wrote.



The New York Academy of Art holds benefit galas, including the Take Home a Nude art auction. Erin Baiano for The New York Times

In Friday’s email announcing changes at the academy, the board said it would create an ethics committee to review policies, including those that govern philanthropy and donor engagement.

The email also said that Ms. Guggenheim would be stepping down as board chair a month earlier than planned. Officials said that her resignation for this year had been in the works since last May.

The academy’s website notes that she and her husband will be honored next month at the Tribeca Ball.

Dionne Searcey is a Times reporter who writes about wealth and power in New York and beyond.

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